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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000866

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: UN ASSESSMENT TEAM IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE
POSITION

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b)

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SUMMARY

11. (C) At a 6/14 meeting requested by the International Donors Border Security Sub-group, members of the UN border assessment team spoke in worrying tones of what their team had found in its two-week examination of the Lebanese-Syrian border. In contrast to his aloof address to the same group when his team first arrived in Lebanon, team leader Lasse Christiansen admitted that "significant gaps" exist that allow the unauthorized passage of both goods and personnel across the border, particularly in the border areas located in or near militant Palestinian camps which were beyond the control of Lebanon's security services. It was evident the LIBAT team was uncomfortable with what they had found and stated several times that although they understood their mandate was strictly to conduct a "technical assessment," they were now faced with a "dilemma" about how to report to UNSYG Ban Ki-moon evidence that "illegal decisions" have been made by personnel assigned to guard the border. Although the team refused to discuss specific recommendations they plan to submit to the SYG on June 22, Christiansen said they would likely offer an array of possible solutions ranging from technical assistance, to advisory teams, and possibly an international border force. What was clear, the team leader summarized, was that the LAF was neither equipped nor trained to execute a comprehensive border regime on its own. End summary.

12. (C) The Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT) met with the informal Border Security Sub-group in West Beirut on June 14. Representatives from Canada, France, U.K., Denmark, Germany and the U.S. had requested the meeting to obtain an early readout of the conclusions LIBAT had reached from their discussions with political leaders, members of Lebanon's security services, and field surveys conducted along the eastern and northern borders. Based upon an initial May 30 discussion with the team, sub-group members were not expecting a great deal from today's meeting. At that earlier meeting, team leader Lasse Christiansen had said his team would be examining the entire range of smuggling activities (i.e. not only illegal arms shipments, but also low-level activity, such as common smuggling and its economic impact). At that time, several sub-group members suggested that considering the serious circumstances Lebanon was in, it would be far better to concentrate on border security recommendations that would effectively staunch the flow of

destabilizing weapons, rather than the low-grade smuggling of consumer goods. At the time, the team leader said he would take it under advisement and abruptly ended the meeting.

CHANGE OF ATTITUDE

13. (C) The LIBAT team on June 14 was a much less confident group. Team leader Christiansen said his five-person team was "slightly wiser now" and described the team's field surveys to the five official crossing points, as well as inspections to several more remote areas of the border, as the most valuable part of their assessment mission. He still maintained that his core mandate was to concentrate on "technical matters," but he conceded it was impossible to ignore the very real problems of insufficient resources, political complexities, and evidence that "illegal decisions" were being made by security personnel assigned to guard the border that allowed the transfer of unidentified persons and goods.

14. (C) LIBAT members described large stretches of the border that would be "difficult, if not impossible" to seal completely. In particular, they noted that border regions straddled by militant Palestinian operating camps were essentially "no-go" areas for Lebanon's security forces, who depended on difficult-to-maintain perimeter patrols to monitor and control cross-border traffic. Christiansen spoke of one interview with a junior LAF commander who said that to enter such areas would entail almost certain exchanges of fire.

15. (C) This discussion brought up the role of the LAF. Christiansen said he planned to note in his report the

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inherent difficulty of employing Lebanese army units for border security. He stated it was clear from their field observations that the army was over-extended and not particularly motivated to patrol borders. Christiansen said that more than one LAF commander expressed the hope that the army would be able to turn over the task to a more appropriate security organization. Emphasizing that army units were not trained for the mission, he implied that one of his recommendations would be the creation of a dedicated border security force that would possess the mobility, communications, and appropriate firepower needed to stop smuggling at any level. Although he was not familiar with the detailed concept of operations of the German-led Northern Border Pilot Program, Christiansen said he believed the integrated border security approach they were pursuing could possibly lead to the establishment of a modern, effective border force, which would free the army to concentrate on its more traditional responsibilities.

16. (C) Addressing the "complicit" behavior by certain security personnel that they suspect has contributed to a problematic border, team members said they had been "puzzled and worried" by the fact that despite incontrovertible evidence that arms were being smuggled into Lebanon, regional LAF, ISF, Customs and Surete General commanders they interviewed said they had almost never intercepted an illegal shipment. The LIBAT team leader said his team did not have the time or the mandate to investigate this phenomena, but implied he intended to report to the SYG that it was a significant problem that required a solution.

"A DILEMMA"

17. (C) Returning once again to his position that his team was only directed to investigate technical matters, Christiansen acknowledged he now faced a dilemma, because it was clear the border situation required far more than technical measures. Although he declined to discuss specific recommendations his team would be submitting to SYG Ban

Ki-moon on June 22, he did indicate that he would be offering a range of possible solutions: robust technical assistance to Lebanese forces already on the border; international advisory teams to train Lebanese forces; perhaps even an international monitoring force itself. But it was clear that he viewed such recommendations with caution, giving the impression he was anxious about possible criticism from Security Council members that he had overreached his mandate.

Christiansen said he and his colleagues would be returning to New York on June 16, discuss their findings, make a decision on the parameters of the report, and spend a week drafting the final document. Since LIBAT is reporting directly to the SYG, he was unsure whether their findings would serve as an annex to the upcoming 1701 report or be released to the Security Council separately.

18. (C) When the floor opened to questions, the French representative asked whether LIBAT had uncovered clear evidence of illegal arms shipments. Christiansen replied in the negative, but reiterated that his team was not focused on that issue. He did acknowledge, however, that it would be impossible for his report to ignore the conditions (over-stretched security units, sections of the border not under GOL control, poorly equipped/trained personnel, rudimentary communications, complete lack of technical border monitoring equipment) and political realities (undeniable existence of arms in Lebanon, lack of a clearly delineated border) that has created a complex situation that must be rectified.

19. (C) The U.K. representative asked if LIBAT believed the German-led Pilot Project was the "right track" to pursue to assist the GOL. Christiansen stated that although it was still in its early stages, the pilot project appeared to be the best near-term solution to securing Lebanon's borders. If the concept proved effective, Christiansen saw no reason, based upon his team's assessment, that it could not be extended to the entire border region. But he did restate his conviction that the project's heavy reliance on the over-extended LAF may be risky and that an optimum long-term solution was the establishment of specialized border agency.

110. (C) In closing, the LIBAT team leader said his team was also convinced that the lack of a delineated border between

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Lebanon and Syria was a serious obstacle to a secure frontier. He noted with chagrin that in some ways Lebanon was worse off than Afghanistan, which even though it had to deal with aggressive Taliban cross-border incursions, at least possessed a clearly defined, recognizable border.
FELTMAN